



Vitaly Pisarenko

November 30th 2019

Saturday was a cold and frosty day and, whilst our audience had the luxury of warm hats and coats to fend off the chill of a 12°C hall, this was not afforded to our soloist of the day, the 32year old Ukrainian / Russian pianist Vitaly Pisarenko. However, when many would have struggled with the cold, from his first entry he appeared unphased by it and indeed gave us a memorable exhibition of astonishing virtuosity and musicianship.

Each half of his well-balanced programme started with early Beethoven sonatas, beginning with his first , Op.2 No. 1 Dedicated to his hero, Haydn, this was delivered with the reverence it deserved and the clarity and drive of the final Prestissimo would have pleased the dedicatee no end!

The first half ended with two Chopin Polonaises - Op. 26 Nos. 1 and 2 - and his third Ballade. The second Polonaise was particularly impressive with its menacing opening figure and Vitaly's judicious use of the sustaining pedal lent great clarity to all three pieces and indeed to all his recital.

After the intermission came Beethoven's Sonata Op. 31 No. 2. By this time Beethoven had developed his own individual persona and the three contrasting movements of this work were beautifully executed, particularly the Adagio with its slow melody and stuttering accompaniment and the contrasting fluidity of the final Allegretto.

Next we heard Bela Bartok's Suite Op. 14. This was typical Bartok from beginning to end, spikey, angular and generally very speedy and played with incredible precision. When I said to Vitaly that it sounded fiendishly difficult he retorted, " It's actually quite easy; I learned it in three days"! Whilst not normal fare for our audience this, hopefully, was an interesting introduction to Bartok's sound world and certainly formed a good bridge between Beethoven and the final work in this recital - Stravinsky's "Firebird".

"Firebird" is probably Stravinsky's best known work apart from, maybe, his "Rite of Spring", and both were originally written as ballet scores. However, due to their popularity, over time these and other works of his have been transcribed by various people for all sorts of instrumental combinations, and the Agosti transcription of "Firebird" for piano solo that Vitaly played as his finale is probably the most well known. It makes huge demands on the soloist as Agosti endeavoured to encapsulate Stravinsky's rich orchestration into a work for only two hands; it only works in the correct hands and Vitaly's were just such hands. This was an electrifying rendition and not just for the sheer virtuosity as there were gorgeous quiet sections as well. The thunderous applause at the end said it all.

Virtuosity is a given nowadays and over the years we have heard some fine pianists at Ardrishaig, but it was Vitaly's musical integrity and attention to detail which was a "cut above" and truly inspirational. This was indeed a recital to remember.

Philip Bowden-Smith